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Issue Brief Final Draft

The Bi/Multiracial Population and Disability

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Description: This issue brief discusses the ways in which issues pertaining to bi/multiracial identity and disability intersect and overlap. It focuses on how disabilities are understood in the bi/multiracial community and how people of more than one race are perceived and treated as a result of their disability.

Key Points:

- The American multiracial population is growing four times faster than the rest of the population.
- The combination of bi/multiracial and disabled creates a set of issues unique to this specific group.
- Workplace rights are an area of concern for the multiracial population, the disabled population, and the multiracial and disabled population.
- Social cross pressure arise when a person with more than racial heritage and tradition may be encourages to deal with disability in different or even opposing ways.

Images:



http://fairuselab.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/equal_rights_for_all.jpg

<http://www.lvcil.org/ada>

Issue Brief:

Disability, according to the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health*, can be defined as a broad term that encompasses “impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. (Brault, 1). This understanding of disability, and the fact that Americans are beginning to self-identify as bi/multiracial at a higher rate, means that the bi/multiracial and disabled portion of the population may be growing in size and importance. In fact, United States Census data shows that not only were there 7.5 million Americans who identified as multiracial in 2012, but that the multiracial population is growing at four times the rate of the rest of the population (Florida). The intersection of these two identities is not necessarily one that is common or often presented in the public discourse, but there are very real issues and problems that arise from disabled people who identify as more than one race.

Perhaps the primary issue of specific relevance to this intersection of disability and bi/multiracial identification is employment rights. Workplace rights are a main focus of disability advocates, and is an area of such serious concern that the Americans With Disabilities Act was signed in 1990 to prevent discrimination against disabled Americans in employment and all government programs (“Introduction...”). Similarly, bi/multiracial workers suffer from discrimination in that they are paid less than workers of a single race, even minorities (Remedios, Chasteen, and Oey, 204). “Specifically, census data reveal that biracial men of Black and White racial heritages (i.e. Black/White) report earning, on average, \$6.30 less per hour than White men” (Remedios, Chasteen, and Oey, 204). Interestingly enough, African Americans with lighter skin tend to earn more than African Americans with darker skin (Goldsmith, Hamilton, and Darity). This does not necessarily refute the idea of discrimination against biracial individuals in the workplace, but reinforces the idea that whiter workers may be preferred to bi/multiracial workers.

A 2013 Pomona College study found that biracial Americans earn ten percent less than individuals identifying with one race, but that biracial individuals who identified in part as Asian in the Western United States were paid just as well as, if not better than, their counterparts of one race. It is possible that this is the case because the West has a large Asian population. This finding may support the idea that as the nation becomes more diverse and racially complex, biracial workers could begin to earn an equal wage (Sweeney and Jacinto, 10). These two types of discrimination are potentially combined and compounded when a bi/multiracial worker with a disability, physical or mental, seeks employment or a fair and equal wage, so it is important to recognize the presence of this type issue as it applies to the multiracial and disabled population in the United States.

Just as it is important to recognize discrimination against multiracial and disabled Americans in the workforce, it is imperative to understand that the multiracial disabled community may face social cross pressures from family members, friends, or social groups of different races that tend to understand and respond to disability in different ways. That different religious and cultural beliefs tend to predominate in specific races can play a massive role in the treatment and handling of disability. “Traditional beliefs about the cause of chronic illness or disability will play a significant role in determining family and community attitudes toward individuals with a disability and will influence when, how, and why medical input is sought” (Groce and Zola). For example, a disabled individual who identifies as both African-American and Latino may have parents and family members that respond to his or her condition with divergent perspectives. Latino families may tend to rely on a close-knit family structure to deal with disability, but their heritage may demand that deny that males actually have a disability while asking females to endure the disability (Zea, Quezada, and Belgrave, 1). African-American families, however, because religion, especially protestant Christianity, is of such primary importance in social life, may turn to faith to aid the adjustment to a family member’s disability (Rogers-Dulan and Blacher). While it would of course be possible for these different methods of responding to disability to support and enhance one another, it could also happen that the social meaning of disability is extremely complicated for bi/multiracial individuals.

There exists a set of issues unique to disabled and bi/multiracial Americans that combines issues of importance to both groups. The two areas that relate perhaps most directly to the concerns of multiracial and disabled Americans are workplace rights and social cross pressures in dealing with disability. Understanding how these issue areas

relate to disabled and multiracial individuals is key in serving the needs of this portion of the American population.

Relevant Websites:

United States Census Bureau

<https://www.census.gov>

American Disability Association

<http://www.adanet.org>

“Passing as Black: How Biracial Americans Choose Identity”

<http://healthland.time.com/2010/12/16/passing-as-black-how-biracial-americans-choose-identity/>

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